



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Policy and Resources Committee – 11 March 2013

Boundary Review update

Purpose of report: To outline the new approach proposed by DCLG for reviewing the size of the Council and to seek Members' views on whether to formally request a review.

Attachment(s):

Appendix 1 : Possible reconfiguration of District wards

Appendix 2 : Summary of possible distribution of Members

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Council is scheduled to begin a review of parish arrangements in the district, which includes reviewing the boundaries and number of councillors of parish and town councils, after the County Council election in May. This is following a request by two parish councils, and also because the parish arrangements have not been reviewed since 1998.
- 1.2 While parish reviews (known as community governance reviews) are carried out by the local authority, reviews of district council electoral arrangements are carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission). The Commission carries out reviews of the electoral arrangements for local authorities where the number of electors in wards has become imbalanced, or where a local authority requests a review if, for example, there is a wish to review the number of councillors it elects (usually to request a reduction in numbers).
- 1.3 Until now, the process for implementing proposals to reduce the number of councillors has been a long one, particularly where a council holds whole council elections every four years. Brandon Lewis MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, has now agreed a revised approach with the Commission, and has written to all local authority leaders outlining the changes.
- 1.4 This new approach means that any changes can be implemented on the first practicable local election day (i.e. the first Thursday in May) following the Commission making the necessary Order, irrespective of when the council would normally hold elections.
- 1.5 In view of the letter from the Minister and this shortened approach, Members are asked to consider whether a review of the number of councillors representing East Northamptonshire Council by the Commission should be requested.

2.0 The process for requesting an electoral review

- 2.1 Any authority wishing to review the number of councillors it has can request that the Commission carries out an electoral review. A review takes approximately a year, with an initial consultation on the number of councillors, followed by further consultation on changes to ward boundaries that would be needed if a change in the number of councillors was recommended.
- 2.2 If members of this committee were minded to pursue an electoral review, the process would be as follows:
 - Report to go to Council on 22 April

- Formal request to the Commission, subject to agreement at Full Council (this request would need to be made soon after the Council meeting in order to be accommodated in the Commission's work programme for 2014/15)
- Review lasting approximately one year, followed by the Order being laid in Parliament
- Out-of-turn election would be held in 2016 to elect councillors to the new electoral wards. The 2015 election could still go ahead as planned, or the council could ask the Minister to postpone the election and extend the current term for all members by one year
- It would then be for the council to decide whether to continue with a four-yearly cycle from 2016, or have an initial three-year term so that elections went back to occurring in 2019, 2023 and so on

3.0 The reasons for requesting an electoral review

- 3.1 The council has taken on a more strategic role, with a number of services being delivered by other organisations on the council's behalf (for example waste and recycling, housing, leisure provision, grounds maintenance). The council has also entered into a number of partnerships with other authorities for the provision of other services (for example finance, payroll, legal services). Staff numbers have reduced accordingly, but the number of councillors has remained unchanged since 2006.
- 3.2 Over the last three years, the number of staff (in terms of full-time equivalents) has decreased, as shown below:
- July 2009 (204 FTE) – December 2012 (174 FTE): reduction of 15%
- 3.3 Numerous local authorities either have recently undergone or are currently undergoing an electoral review. Northamptonshire County Council has recently seen its recommendation for a reduction in the number of councillors from 73 to 57 (21.9%) accepted by the Commission and the new structures will come into force at the May 2013 election.
- 3.4 Of the 18 district councils that are currently undergoing an electoral review, the Commission is proposing a reduction in council size for 13 authorities.
- 3.5 A reduction in the number of councillors could lead to cost savings at a time when the council is under increasing pressure to reduce expenditure. Members' allowances and expenses in 2011/12 (excluding those for non-elected Members of the Standards Board) came to £241,800. Fewer councillors would provide the opportunity for significant cost savings.
- 3.6 An electoral review also offers the opportunity to look at the pattern of wards across the district and electoral equality, once agreement on council size has been reached. As communities change over time, it may be beneficial to review whether the current pattern of wards adequately reflects today's communities.
- 3.7 An example of a possible reconfiguration of wards, which splits elector numbers evenly across the District, is attached. This is only one possibility, and the details of town wards would need to be developed. Such a change would reduce councillor numbers from 40 to 31 (22.5%), which would result in a cost saving of around £54k if Members' allowances were kept the same.

4.0 Equality and diversity implications

- 4.1 There are no equality and diversity implications associated with requesting an electoral review.

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 In undertaking reviews (upon request and because electoral imbalances trigger a review), the Commission works to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which consolidates electoral review provisions previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 Costs associated with consultations on proposals would be met by the Commission. Any such review would be carried out within existing resources using staff from the Policy & Performance Team and Democratic and Electoral Services team, with additional support from officers with expertise across the council.

6.2 It is anticipated that a reduction in the number of councillors would ultimately lead to cost savings.

7.0 Risk management

7.1 There are no risks associated with requesting an electoral review.

8.0 Corporate outcomes

8.1 The following corporate outcomes are applicable:

- Strong community leadership
- Good Value for Money

9.0 Recommendations

9.1 The Committee is recommended to consider whether to:

1. Resolve to recommend that the Council requests that an electoral review be carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England with a view to reducing the number of councillors elected to East Northamptonshire Council.

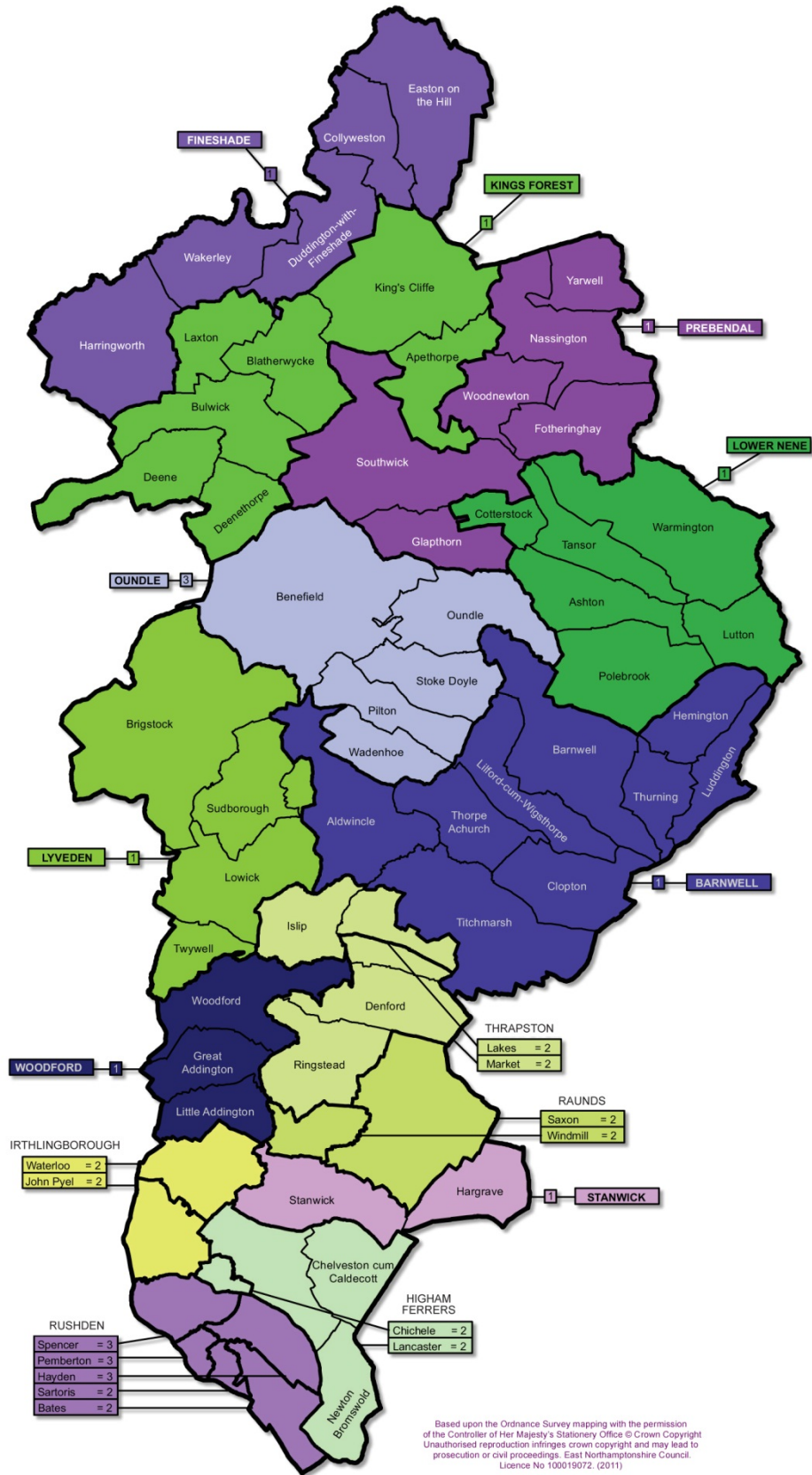
(Reason: to maximise cost savings and secure effective and convenient local government for electors in East Northamptonshire)

Legal	Power: Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers: None					
Person Originating Report: David Oliver, Chief Executive, 01832 742105, doliver@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
Date: 26 February 2013					
CFO		MO		CX	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)

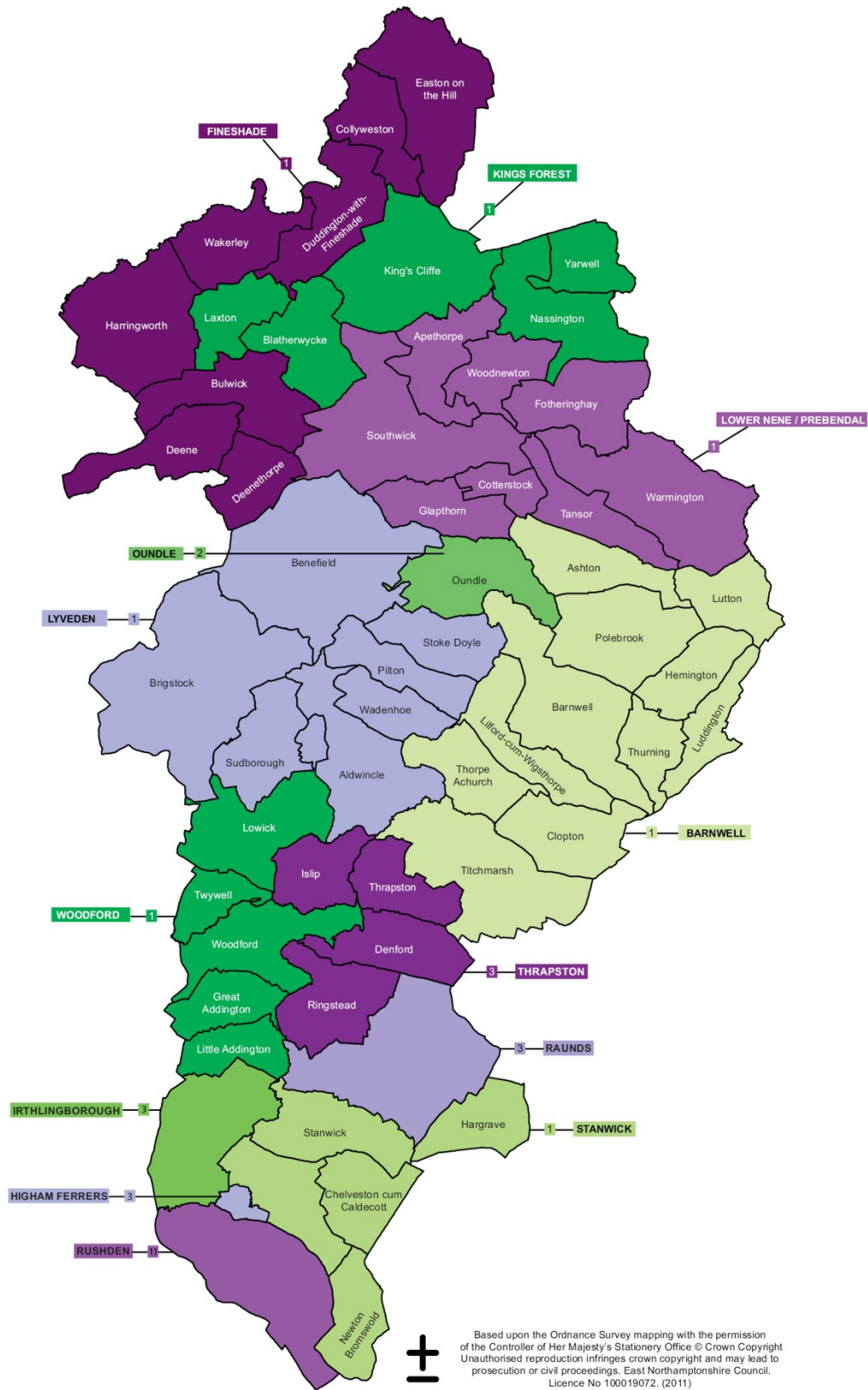
Item 13 - Appendix 1

Current wards

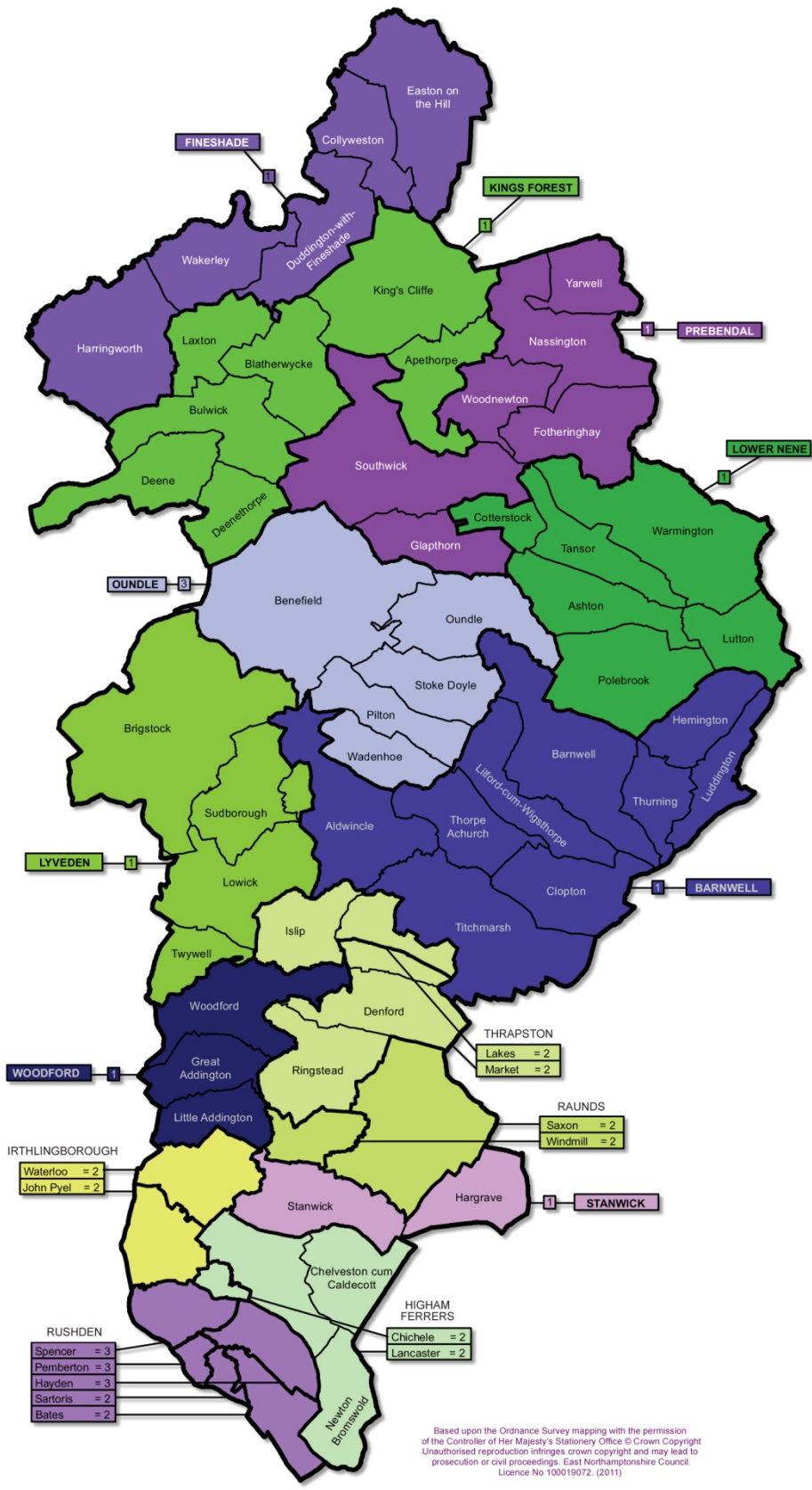


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Possible new wards



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Agenda item 13 – Boundary Review Update - Appendix 2

<i>Current warding arrangements</i>	<i>Possible warding arrangements</i>
Higham Ferrers = 4 members	Higham Ferrers = 3 members
Irthlingborough = 4 members	Irthlingborough = 3 members
Oundle = 3 members	Oundle = 2 members
Raunds = 4 members	Raunds = 3 members
Rushden = 13 members	Rushden = 10 members
Thrapston (including Islip, Denford and Ringstead) = 4 members	Thrapston (including Islip, Denford and Ringstead) = 3 members
Rural = 8 members	Rural = 7 members
Total = 40 members	Total = 31 members